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The Devil
AND
Lincoln Minster.

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


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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION.

WHILE the first edition of this little book was in the press, the writer accidentally fell in with two other versions of the legend. They are gathered from two widely different sources, but there is every reason to believe them genuine. Though neither version can boast a Lincolnshire origin, yet, curiously enough, both bear out the suggestions as to the origin and wider meaning of the legend.

“The wind, one day, brought two imps to view the new Minster at Lincoln. Both imps were greatly impressed with the magnitude and beauty of the structure, and one of them, smitten by a fatal curiosity, slipped inside the building to see what was going on. His temerity, however, cost him dear, for he was so petrified with astonishment at the wonderful things he both saw and heard, that his heart became as stone within him, and he remained rooted to the ground. The other imp, full of grief at the loss of his brother, flew madly round about the minster, seeking in vain for the lost one. At length, being wearied out, he alighted, quite unwittingly, upon the shoulders of a certain witch, and was also, and in like manner, instantly turned to stone! But the wind still haunts the Minster precincts waiting their return, now hopelessly disconsolate! and now raging with fury!”

The other version is much more prosaic in character :—

“When the Minster was nearing its completion, the devil, who had narrowly and jealously watched the good bishop’s proceedings, at once took up his position as over-lord, saying with a grim smile, as he looked over Lincoln, “Ah! my good friend, all this is mine!”

One other matter connected with the legend, perhaps calls for some attention: the notorious attempt made by “Oxford men” to appropriate one more good thing from the City of Lincoln, namely, the cult of the “Lincoln Imp.”

No doubt at Oxford, as in Lincoln, many undesirable personages are to be met with, but the University authorities themselves would hasten to declare that if perchance but one imp should be found within the walls of Lincoln College, he must have been a contraband importation, and was not indigenous to Oxford.

An old writer* disposes of the Oxford claim to the legend in these words:—

“Some fetch the original of this proverb from Lincoln College in Oxford, on the top of which there is a stone picture, which we may suppose was intended by the architect for an ordinary antick only; but vulgar opinion has made a devil of it, and because the proverb may be easily, they’ll have it truly, applied to it; but the proverb being thought more ancient than Lincoln College, it must be originally applied to the Cathedral Church of Lincoln.”

* “*Lincolnshire*,” p. 1441, date 1719. Linc. Cath. Lib. B.B.3.

The Bishop of Lincoln is indeed the Official Visitor of Lincoln College, Oxford, (founded by Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln 1420—1431); but “The Imp” is to be seen in the Lincoln “Angel Choir,” begun 1255 and finished 1280. From the above evidence our Oxford plagiarists are welcome to draw their own conclusions.

Lincoln folk, in truth, though willing enough to lend their sons and their daughters to Oxford (that ancient seat of learning, once within the borders of their own diocese), like the witty Canon of St. Paul’s, “*cannot afford to give up their devil!*”

INTRODUCTION.

SO far as the writer is aware, the following version of this old Lincolnshire Legend has not hitherto appeared in print. It was told him some five or six years ago by a North Lincolnshire man, sixty years of age, who, as a boy, had heard his father relate it.

Briefly, it is as follows:—The coming of Bishop Remigius to Lincoln made the devil very angry, for up to that time he had had it all his own way in the town and district. The devil tried his utmost to turn him from his purpose of building a Cathedral, but without success. At last in desperation—the Minster then nearing its completion—the devil waylaid the bishop at the south-western corner of the building and tried to kill him. But the good prelate in his extremity called for aid upon the Blessed Virgin Mary—to whom the Church was to be dedicated—whereupon, the Blessed Virgin sent a mighty rushing wind, which, catching the devil, so hustled and buffeted him, that he slipped inside the Church for safety, where he has been ever since, nor dare he come out, knowing that the wind awaits his return in order to make an end of him.

Another version of the legend runs thus:—"The Monks supposed that the devil, who could not but take notice of such a stately structure for divine worship in his ranges, did look upon it with a sour and malicious countenance. From whence they deduced a proverb to express the ill aspect of envious and malicious men at such good things as they don't like."

"He looks as the devil over Lincoln." *

A third version is as follows:—"The exposed situation of the Cathedral, and the rather dissolute life of some of the Clergy some centuries ago, gave rise to the following legend. The wind and the devil being on a friendly tour, arrived at Lincoln Minster, where the latter addressed his friend thus, "just wait outside here whilst I go in and have a chat with my friends the Dean and Canons." "All right" said the wind, and he has been waiting there ever since! Most certainly the wind on the calmest and sultriest day may always be there felt if not seen; but what may be the inference from the devil's long stay with his friends inside?" (*Whites', Lincolnshire.*)

It is possible that in these traditions lie the remains of two, if not three, older and probably antagonistic versions of a Satire on the Lincoln Clergy; the first having its origin amongst the "Regular" Clergy of some older establishment; the second and more favourable version amongst the "Secular" Canons of the new Lincoln Foundation—a kind of "Secular" Roland for a

* "*Lincolnshire*," p. 1441, date 1719.

“Regular” Oliver;—The third and least favourable of all may be safely imputed to a thankless and faithless “Laity,” who would be ready to exclaim

“A plague on both your houses.”

It is not improbable that the legend owes its origin to the quarrel between Remigius and the Archbishop of York; the latter asserting that Lincoln stood in his Diocese, and claiming jurisdiction over the new Minster.

So much for the popular and more obvious side of the matter. But it may be that in this tradition lies a deeper and more spiritual meaning, concerning which the following is suggested.

By the devil may be meant the protests and opposition of the sullen and “sour-visaged” Lincoln men who could not have viewed with equanimity the destruction of one fourth of their town, in order to supply a site for the proposed new Cathedral; particularly when upwards of one hundred and sixty-six houses had already been razed to the ground to make room for the outworks of the Norman stronghold erected by the king. That there would be opposition not confined to protests is highly probable, for it cannot be assumed with reason that the Norman spoilers of Saxon England would respect with too great nicety, the rights of the freeholders of Lincoln. It is therefore easy to imagine with what indignation and overt acts of resistance, these Lincoln men would meet this confiscation and destruction of one-half of their town.

By the wind may be understood the constraining power of the Holy Spirit, blessing, and crowning with success the work of the Church under the good Bishop Remigius.

Up to this point an ecclesiastical origin may be safely assigned to the tradition, as also perhaps the idea of this "devil" of Saxon resistance to the spiritual and religious activity of the Normans, seeking at length a sure refuge within the Minster itself. But when it is remembered how deeply rooted in the minds of the people the idea of the oppression, greed, and avarice of both "Regular" and "Secular" Ecclesiastical communities was, the writer feels justified in suggesting a lay origin to the scurrilous, not to say libellous statement that the devil visited his friends inside the Minster, and has remained there ever since!

In either case the tradition is as interesting as it is unique.

Lincoln, 1897.



When Rème the Norman to Lincoln first came,
The devil awoke
And sharply spoke
To his myrmidons gather'd around him.

“You’ve slighted my orders, repeatedly giv’n,
To keep that scamp
At Court or in Camp,
And scare him away from old Lindum.”

“At Fèscamp a Judas, he now is a bishop,
Squat, swarthy in looks,
But a devil for works,
And mischief for us now is brewin’!”

The bishop arriv'd, and likewise the king,
 In spite of the devil
 They worked much ill,
 Among the poor people of "Nichol."

One builded a Castle, the other a Church, *
 And houses pull'd down,
 And levell'd the ground,
Sans "by're leave" to the people of Lincoln.

M en curs'd the bishop, men curs'd the king,
 The devil was pleas'd,
 And quickly seiz'd
 This one golden chance for dishing the Church.

The king vex'd him not, for well did he know
 That in this Castle
 He need not wrastle
 For souls to hang up in his larder.

* see Notes A.B.

The bishop was up to each move on the board ;
 He bless'd the ground
 In episcopal gownd,
With crozier, and candle, with bell, and with book.

The Minster was built, and waited the pleasure
 Of this little bishop
 To open his new shop,
For cleansing the souls of poor sin-stricken men.

The devil was wroth, and gnash'd his teeth ;
 He stamp'd on the ground,
 His eyes roll'd round,
And fell on the form of this strange little bishop.

And as the good bishop gaz'd on his fine Church,
 The devil came up
 And dash'd the cup
Of episcopal gladness from out of his hand.

They wrestled and fought, they curs'd and swore,

(The bishop in latin—

The other was slangin'

Like an old fashion'd Thames bargee!)

They panted and sobb'd, they stumbl'd and bobb'd,

They scratch'd and kick'd

Till the devil was nick'd!

For the bishop sought safety in prayer.

The bishop he pray'd, the Virgin sent aid,

The wind came on

Full lusty and strong,

And hustled the devil from pillar to post;

It twisted his tail, and crumpled his horns,

So for safety he went,

That is, he was sent

To Cov'ntry; (or rather slipp'd inside the Church);

Where he's been ever since, nor dare he come out,
 For well doth he know,
 The wind his foe
 Still awaits his return at the corner sou'-west!

The devil within the Minster new,
 Made Rémi (now sick),
 The ghost give up quick,
 As was clearly foretold by reading the stars! *

The bishop they laid in a marble tomb
 With pomp and show;
 But the devil we know,
 Though turn'd to stone, still looks over Lincoln Town.

* * * * *

The bishop we know died long ago,
 The wind still waits, nor will he go
 Till he has a chance of beating his foe;
 But the devil hopp'd up without a limp,
 And at once took shape as the "Lincoln Imp."
 And there he sits a'top of the column, †
 And grins at the people who gaze so solemn;
 Moreover, he mocks at the wind below,
 And says, "you may wait till doomsday, O!"

* see Note C. † see Note D.

NOTE A.

"In 1068, William the Conqueror converted the English fortress at Lincoln into a Norman stronghold, 166 houses being destroyed for the completion of the out-works." (*Walks through Linc. Minster*).

NOTE B.

"Remigius began his work of building a Cathedral at Lincoln, about 1074. The Church was ready for consecration in 1092." (*ib.*)

NOTE C.

"May the 9th was fixed for the dedication of the Cathedral. All the bishops of England were bidden by the king to come together to take part in it. One of them, Robert of Hereford, foreseeing from the conjunction of the stars, for he was a skilful astrologer, that the consecration would not take place on the day named, stayed at home. The other bishops assembled, together with a vast crowd of men of all ranks. But three days before the appointed time Remigius died." (*ib.*)

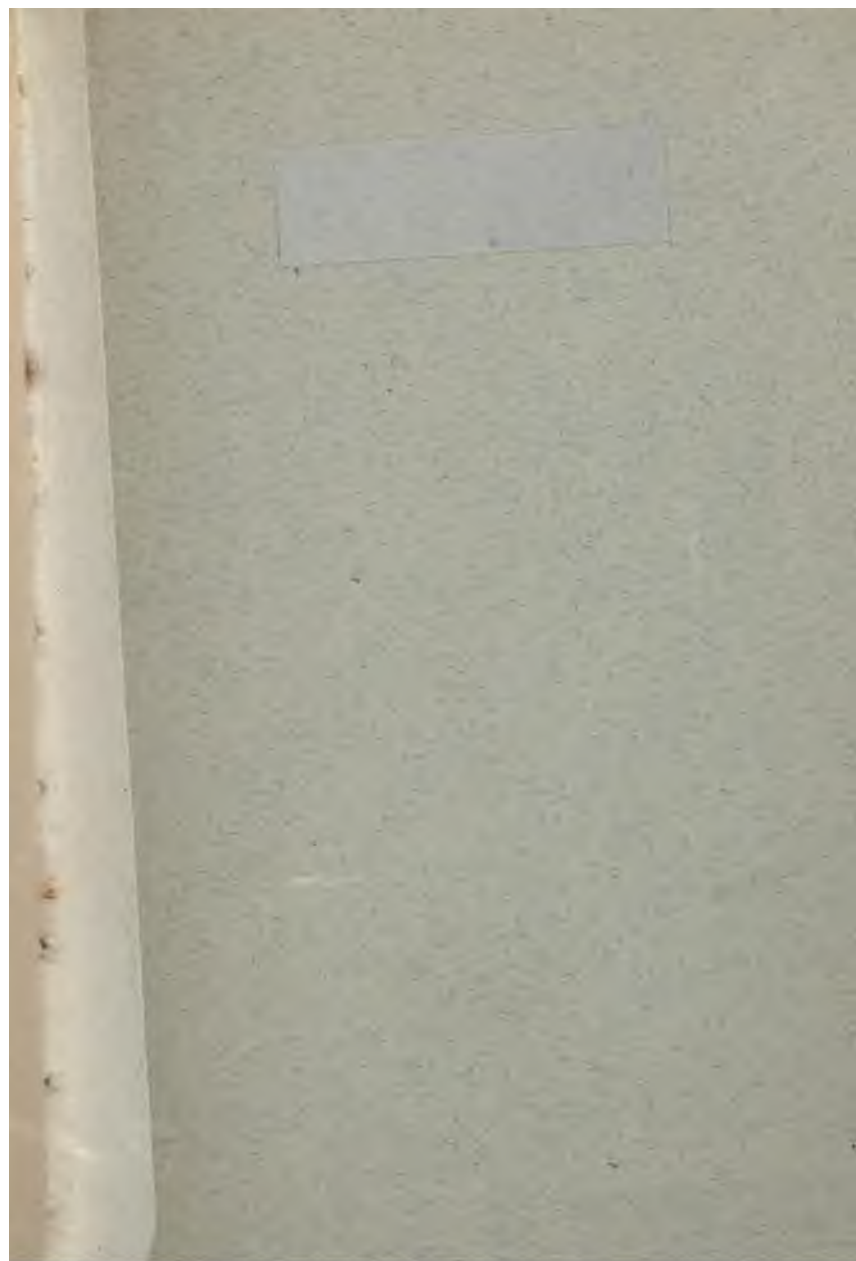
NOTE D.

It may be objected that the Angel Choir not being then in existence, the devil could not have taken up his present commanding position at the time in question. The explanation of this difficulty, however, is obvious.

So little of Remigius' Cathedral remains, and the alterations of and additions to the building are so numerous, that it is natural to suppose the devil would shift his quarters from time to time, choosing with each remove the most beautiful portion of the Cathedral as his particular stall! Besides, "The Imp" is in the Angel Choir; and as want of space forbids a full relation of his movements from Remigius' death to that of Richard Gravesend (1280), let it suffice that the fact that he was so closely connected with the Cathedral from the laying of the foundation stone to its completion be emphasized; and further, that neither the piety and charity of Remigius, the saintliness of St. Hugh, nor the vigorous churchmanship of Grostête, to say nothing of the manifold virtues of their successors, has sufficed to exorcise the building of so objectionable a presence!

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